EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE POLITICAL CURVE OF REACTION TO IMMIGRATION (A non-linear function of support for anti-immigration sentiment)

Xema Gatnau

1. General Framework

The phenomenon is based on a recurring empirical observation:

Social and electoral support for anti-immigration discourse does not increase linearly with the volume of immigration.

When immigration is low, it generates no reaction.

When it is medium and growing, it provokes the greatest anxiety and mobilization.

When it is very high, it becomes normalized as a structural fact, and rejection loses political strength.

Thus, the relationship between the percentage of immigration (X) and support for anti-immigration options (Y) follows a curve with a maximum point and two extremes of stability, not a straight line.

2. The Three Phases of the Curve

🟢 Phase of Invisibility or Tolerance

When immigration is low, its presence is not perceived as a threat or competition.

The majority society maintains a distant or tolerant attitude.

The migration issue is socially secondary and politically marginal.

🟠 Phase of Reaction and Politicization

When immigration grows and becomes visible, a qualitative

change occurs:
The native majority sees its spaces, references, and expectations altered.
Identity debate emerges as a political axis.
The sense of loss or threat activates a collective reaction: support for anti-immigration positions reaches its maximum level.
This is the zone of maximum tension—the conflict between perceived identity and the pace of social change.

🔵 Phase of Irreversibility or Adaptation
When immigration reaches very high levels and change becomes structural:
Diversity becomes the new normal.
The majority identity ceases to be dominant and adapts to a plural reality.
Discourses of rejection lose traction; they can no longer mobilize a majority, only nostalgia.
This is the post-conflict phase of normalization, where diversity ceases to be a topic of struggle and becomes part of the social landscape.

3. Logic of the Model
This framework describes a non-linear political function based on three combined dynamics:
- Accelerated perception of change (psychological): generates anxiety and polarization.
- Demographic composition (structural): groups that most reject immigration lose relative weight as immigration increases.
- Cultural normalization (historical): what is initially perceived as a "threat" becomes "reality".
The balance among these three factors explains why rejection grows to a maximum and then declines.

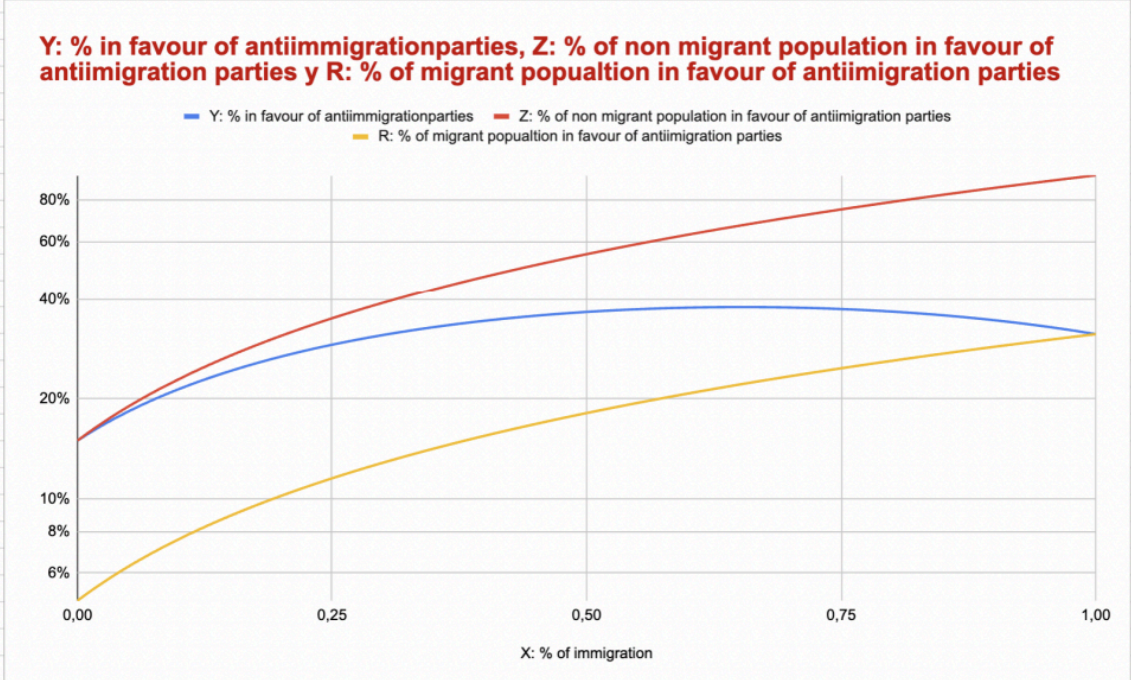
4. Contemporary Explanatory Value
This model helps explain many current cases:
In societies where immigration is new or recent, the issue remains latent for some time but, upon reaching a threshold of mass presence, erupts with force and rejection grows rapidly.
In societies where immigration is already structural and appears irreversible, anti-immigration discourse tends to

stabilize or decline, despite the continued presence of immigrants who may even form a majority.
In metropolitan or global spaces, diversity is no longer a conflict but a framework, while intermediate or peripheral zones are at the peak of tension.
This pattern is not only European: it is also observed in the United States, Brazil, South Africa, and Australia.

5. Political and Symbolic Meaning
The curve shows that anti-immigration rejection is not an automatic reflection of the number of immigrants but a transitional reaction to the pace and perception of change.
It marks the historical discomfort of a society that has not yet culturally adapted to its own internal transformation.
When immigration is low, it is invisible.
When it is medium and growing, it is a problem.
When it is very high, it is a fact.
This sequence summarizes the transition from homogeneous to plural society.
The conflict does not disappear but changes form: it is no longer "us versus them" but an ongoing negotiation within an expanded "us," assuming no cultural, ethnic, or religious group becomes radicalized.

6. Theoretical Value and Originality
The innovation of the model lies in:
- conceiving the phenomenon as a non-linear function with an inflection point,
- integrating psychological, demographic, and political components into a single structure,
- and describing rejection not as an error or deviation but as a structural phase of historical transition toward plurality.
In this sense, the curve is both an analytical tool and a historical metaphor of our time: the politics of the limit—the moment when societies realize that change can no longer be reversed.

% sortida	15%		
ΔZ: sensitivity to increase of immigration		80%	
ßR: ratio preference among migration to antimmigration			33%


Y: % in favour of antiimmigrationparties, Z: % of non migrant population in favour of antiimigration parties y R: % of migrant popualtion in favour of antiimigration parties
Y: % in favour of antiimmigrationparties
Z: % of non migrant population in favour of antiimigration parties
R: % of migrant popualtion in favour of antiimigration parties
80%
60%
40%
20%
10%
8%
6%
0,00
0,25
0,50
0,75
1,00
X: % of immigration

EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE MODEL OF REACTION TO IMMIGRATION

I. Theoretical Contributions

1. Nonlinear Conceptual Structure

The model proposes that the relationship between immigration and support for anti-immigration positions follows a nonlinear trajectory, characterized by a zone of maximum political tension and two extremes of stability. This idea introduces a dynamic interpretation of the phenomenon, contrasting with linear or deterministic approaches. The main theoretical contribution is to represent rejection as a transitional process evolving through three phases: invisibility or tolerance, reaction or politicization, and irreversibility or adaptation. This sequence explains the psychological and social evolution of demographic change within open societies and interprets anti-immigration populism as a temporary, not permanent, phenomenon.

2. Integration of Psychological, Demographic, and Historical Dimensions

The model combines three levels of analysis often treated separately: psychological perception of threat or accelerated change; demographic dynamics involving loss of relative weight of the native group; and historical normalization of diversity once consolidated over time, possibly followed by a new re-homogenization (the most stable form of normalization). This integration provides a systemic understanding of the process, in which collective reaction results from the interaction between perception and structure. The model thus explains why highly diverse societies can exhibit lower identity conflict than transitional ones.

3. Symbolic Redefinition of Rejection

The model interprets anti-immigration rejection as a historical phase of adaptation rather than simple ideological opposition. This reframing shifts the debate from moral or pathological grounds to an analysis of cultural hegemony in transformation. Identity-based populism functions as an adjustment mechanism responding to

the loss of symbolic monopoly by the majority group, giving it a structural role in the transformation of contemporary democracies.

4. Capacity for Generalization
The conceptual framework applies to different national and historical contexts, as it describes a general pattern of perceived change rather than a particular case. This generalization provides value as a cross-context interpretative model, useful for analyzing both European societies and other multicultural environments.

II. Empirical and Formal Contributions
1. Quantitative Formalization of the Political Process
The model translates the political phenomenon into a quantitative function:
$Y = Z(1 - X) + R(X)$
where X represents the proportion of immigrants, Z the anti-immigration support among natives, R the support among immigrants, and Y the aggregate result. This introduces a formal mathematical expression of political behavior, enabling visualization and simulation of how demographic change affects total support.

2. Demographic Decomposition of Political Support
The distinction between two groups (natives and immigrants) with different propensities toward rejection—weighted by their population shares—represents a methodological contribution. It allows analysis of how the radicalization of the majority group can coexist with stagnation or decline of total support, forming a saturation pattern.

3. Sensitivity Parameters and Model Adaptability
Parameters ΔZ and ßR introduce sensitivity mechanisms to adapt the model to specific contexts. These enable simulation of societies with stronger or weaker reactions, or varying degrees of convergence between groups. This flexibility turns the model into a comparative and prospective analytical tool.

4. Coherence Between Formal Model and Historical Interpretation
The numerical model provides empirical support for the historical theory of transition. It graphically

demonstrates how rejection can grow within one group while its overall effect declines, expressing in measurable terms the theory's central paradox. The correspondence between formal structure and historical dynamics adds robustness to the model.

5. Potential for Empirical Verification
By defining observable and quantifiable variables, the model allows empirical verification through electoral data, attitude surveys, or demographic trends. This distinguishes it from theories operating only on discursive levels. The structure thus enables testing hypotheses on the peak and stabilization of rejection.

III. Overall Synthesis
The model unites a theoretical contribution of high interpretive value with an unusually precise empirical formulation. The theoretical dimension unifies social perceptions, demographic dynamics, and historical processes in an evolutionary narrative. The empirical component provides a formal foundation, turning the hypothesis into a verifiable and adaptable function. Together, these create a comprehensive explanatory framework, readable both as a historical theory of transition and as an analytical tool for studying voting behavior and reactions to diversity.